



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A STATISTICAL STUDY IN CAUSES OF POVERTY.

EVERY student of statistics dealing with poverty is more or less familiar with the weaknesses and limitations of "case-counting" as a method of determining the share borne by different factors in causing human misery. This method, in its ordinary form, consists in simply assigning each case of distress to its most prominent cause and then counting the total number of cases assigned to each cause. It is evident to anyone that results so gained must be very erroneous, so long as only one element is selected from the large number of complex causes that go to make up any given case of distress.

A multitude of causes contribute to the final result in every individual case of poverty. For example: The husband, a not very competent workman, and occasional drinker, is thrown out of employment by the stopping of the factory where he had been working. A child falls sick owing to defective drainage, and this unusual expense causes him to allow his trades-union dues to elapse just before a period of general financial depression. Discouraged and tired of "looking for work," and his resources exhausted, he applies for charity. Is the "cause of distress" lack of employment, incompetency, intemperance, sickness, bad sanitation, trades unionism, or "general social conditions" beyond the control of the individual? Manifestly it is any, all, or none of these, according to the individual bias of the compiler, and the particular time and circumstances under which the "case was investigated." Yet this example is typical, and it is from just such cases that the majority of our statistics on the causes of poverty are compiled, by the simple (?) process of determining the single dominant cause of distress in each case and then adding the results; with this difference, that much more is supposed to be known about the above case than is known about a majority of the cases registered with charity organization societies.

It is the aim of this study to in some degree express statistically this complex nature of the ordinary cause of distress. Acting partially on suggestions of Charles Booth and A. G. Warner, the total cause of distress, so to speak, has in each case been divided into ten units. Each contributing element was then assigned a certain number of these units, according to its relative importance, as far as this could be determined by the compiler.

The cases to be analyzed were taken from the files of Englewood and Stock Yards district of the Chicago Bureau of Associated Charities. For the analysis required a considerable amount of knowledge regarding each case was necessary. The cases were selected, therefore, solely upon the basis of the amount of knowledge possessed regarding each family. All so selected had been known to the compilers for some considerable time. A majority of those selected from the Stock Yards district lived in the neighborhood of the Chicago University settlement and were personally known to the residents. Many had been visited by a "friendly visitor" from the Bureau of Charities, who aimed to cultivate personal relations with the family. It is of especial importance that the information thus gathered came from those to whom the family did not stand in the relation of an object of charity and was not confined to times of distress.

The most general, and perhaps, therefore, the least reliable, result obtained from the investigation is that secured by the addition of the total number of units ascribable to each cause of distress. As seen by the first column in the tables given, pp. 618-19, the one thousand units of causation group themselves as follows, with the relative importance indicated:

| | Stock Yards dist. | Englewood. |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Lack of employment, - - - - | 456 | 499 |
| Intemperance, - - - - | 157 | 105 |
| Sickness, - - - - | 154 | 95 |
| Incompetence, - - - - | 61 | 36 |
| Desertion of breadwinner, - - - | 51 | 22 |
| Laziness, - - - - | 34 | 160 |
| Old age, - - - - | 33 | 54 |

| | | | | | Stock Yards dist. | Englewood. |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------------------|------------|
| Death of breadwinner, - | - | - | - | - | 33 | 29 |
| Pauper association, - | - | - | - | - | 17 | 0 |
| Insanity, - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 0 |

Making a still broader and more dangerous generalization, by dividing these units into those ascribable to those causes most dependent upon the fault of the individual, and those rather belonging to a defective society, we have in the Englewood table 690 and in the Stock Yards 731 units ascribable to social causes, and 301 and 269, respectively, due more to the fault of the individual. Such a generality, however, can scarcely fail to be misleading if used alone, and can only be looked upon as one of many things to be considered in determining the responsibility for human misery.

A study of the interdependence of causes as shown by the table gives some interesting results. Taking the statistics from the Stock Yards neighborhood, in the 92 cases where lack of employment is the main cause, intemperance is a contributing factor in 11 instances, incompetence in 17, and sickness in 22. In the 84 cases from the Englewood district giving lack of employment as a main cause, incompetence enters 10 times, laziness 9, sickness 6, and intemperance only 4 times.

In the Stock Yards district the burden of sickness upon the poor is seen to be extremely heavy. Although when the cases are known through a long period of time its importance as a prime cause lessens, it is shown to be a contributing factor in a large number of cases. While only ten times does it become a dominant cause, it is present in 53 instances in a sufficient degree to entitle it to be considered among the contributing causes of distress. This raises it in the final totals from a little over 10 per cent., according to "case counting" methods, to 15.4 per cent. That this cause does not attain the same prominence in the Englewood tables is undoubtedly due in some degree to the more healthy locality, the Stock Yards neighborhood being notoriously unsanitary, and the employment injurious to health.

All other factors, however, seem to sink into insignificance

when compared with the dominating cause, lack of employment. Although the tendency of this method is to decrease the percentage contributed to the whole mass of distress by this cause below that indicated by "case counting," as it often shows that lack of employment is accompanied by subsidiary and contributing causes, still an inadequate labor market contributes nearly three times as many units to the total sum of distress as any other one cause and more than any other four combined. Ninety-two in the Stock Yards and 84 in Englewood out of the 100 cases would have been improved by a better adjustment of the labor market. This was in spite of the fact that the mode of selection would tend to eliminate the purely "out of work" cases, and the further fact that the long continuous knowledge possessed regarding the families caused many who would at first sight have been unhesitatingly classified as unemployed to be placed under other heads because of the development of hidden weaknesses and defects.

In both tables intemperance is shown to be of comparatively minor importance. It is generally a subsidiary cause, as is shown by the fact that, although it enters into a considerable number of cases in both tables, the average number of units assigned it per case is in each instance a trifle over four.

Perhaps the greatest discrepancy between the two tables is seen in the importance assigned to laziness. This may be partially accounted for by the fact that the Englewood compiler was inclined to put more emphasis on individual defects of character than the one from the Stock Yards, and felt that the table of causes was deficient in that it did not sufficiently provide for such defects. Therefore, many other forms of individual weakness, especially moral ones, were included by him under the general head of laziness, and it must not be concluded that in every case so marked the party had refused work. Incompetency is another cause where subjective differences undoubtedly show themselves. In other respects, however, the uniformity of the results obtained is little less than wonderful when it is remembered that the analyses were made entirely inde-

I. STOCK YARDS.
SUMMARY.

| | Total units | Number of cases of each degree | | | | | | | | | | Total five units and over | Contributing causes | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|---------|--------------------|---|
| | | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | Lack of employment | Intem- perance | Laziness | Incom- petency | Death of breadwinner | Desertion by breadwinner | Insanity | Sickness | Old age | Pauper association | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lack of employ- ment | 92 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 10 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 48 | | 11 | 6 | 17 | 2 | 1 | | | 22 | 3 | 1 |
| Intemperance | 456 | | | 1 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 10 | 2 | 18 | 15 | 25 | 11 | 33 | 9 | 2 | | | 59 | 10 | 1 |
| Laziness | 39 | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | 40 | 4 | 6 | 10 | | | 1 | | 18 | | 1 |
| Incompetency | 157 | | | | | | | | 5 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Death of bread- winner | 34 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 5 | 12 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 5 | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Desertion by bread- winner | 31 | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | | | 3 | 10 | | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Insanity | 61 | | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 14 | 2 | 5 | 2 | | | 2 | | 3 | | |
| Sickness | 7 | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | 5 | | |
| Old age | 33 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pauper association . | 51 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 53 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 154 | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 11 | 17 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | |
| | 8 | | | | | | | | | | | 31 | 31 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | | | | |
| | 33 | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 5 | 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 14 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 17 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 3 | | | | | 4 | | | | | |

CAUSES OF POVERTY

619

II. ENGLEWOOD.

SUMMARY.

| | Total units | Number of cases of each degree | | | | | | | | | | Total five units and over | Contributing causes | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|---|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------|----------|--------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|---------|--------------------|
| | | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | Lack of employment | Intemperance | Laziness | Incompetency | Death of breadwinner | Desertion by breadwinner | Insanity | Sickness | Old age | Pauper association |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lack of employment..... | 84 | 20 | 1 | 11 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 13 | 9 | 13 | 1 | 48 | | 4 | 9 | 10 | 2 | 1 | | 6 | 3 | |
| Intemperance..... | 499 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 5 | | 11 | 6 | 9 | 21 | 22 | 6 | 3 | | 20 | | |
| Laziness..... | 105 | | | | | | | | | | | | 15 | | 16 | | | | | 7 | | |
| Incompetency.... | 40 | | | | 1 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 14 | | 13 | 9 | 3 | | 2 | | | | | | |
| Death of breadwinner..... | 160 | | | | | | | 1 | 3 | 9 | 5 | | 18 | 10 | | 4 | | | | | | |
| Desertion by breadwinner..... | 18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Insanity..... | 36 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sickness..... | 7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Old age..... | 29 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pauper association. | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 22 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| | 95 | | | | | | | | | | | | 16 | 2 | | 1 | 5 | | | | | |
| | 14 | | | | | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 4 | | 2 | 1 | | 2 | | | | |
| | 54 | | | | | | | | | | | | 11 | | 7 | 2 | | 7 | | | | |

pendent of each other and the further fact that the families were taken from two neighborhoods differing largely in their economic and social organization. The Stock Yards is a specialized industrial community, almost all the residents being connected with the one industry, with its peculiarities of wages and trade fluctuations. Englewood, on the other hand, is almost suburban in many of its characteristics; has no dominant industrial center; its residents are engaged in a great number of small and considerably diversified industries. The small number of cases selected makes this uniformity more remarkable, and if it had been possible to have analyzed a much larger number, undoubtedly many of the existing differences would have been eliminated.

That the method as here carried out has many defects no one is more thoroughly aware than the writer, and it might be well, in conclusion, to say just a few words regarding the more evident criticisms. In the first place, the list of causes might easily be criticised, both for sins of omission and commission. It is especially deficient, perhaps, in those causes, indicating lack of moral character—dishonesty, roving disposition, moral weakness, etc. But these are causes particularly susceptible of subjective influence, and do not lend themselves readily to classification, and, finally, it is always a question with such characteristics,

NOTE.—In the left half of the tables the cases are arranged after the name of each factor in the order of the number of units contributed by the factor, as indicated by the figures at the head of the column; for example, in the Stock Yards table, lack of employment contributed the entire 10 units in eight cases, 9 units in three cases, etc. In the right half of the tables those cases in which the main cause (given at the extreme left) contributed more than 5 units are further analyzed to show the character and importance of contributing causes. For example, in the Stock Yards table, in those cases in which lack of employment was the principal cause (contributing 5 or more units), intemperance was a contributing factor 11 times; laziness, 6; incompetence, 17, etc. The extent to which these contributing causes entered is shown by the number of *units* they contributed, indicated by the *italic* figures placed beneath the number of cases. For example, intemperance contributed 25 units in the 11 cases in which it entered. In every instance the upper figures indicate number of cases, the lower, *italic*, the units. As there seemed to be several instances where no one cause contributed five units, the footings of the right half of the table will not agree with those on the left.

more, perhaps, than with any other class, in how far they are actually causes, and how far they are effects of poverty. Other causes are omitted because they so seldom appear that they may be disregarded without affecting the final result. There are also, undoubtedly, evils of overlapping in the schedule used. In reply to all such criticisms it may be said that the schedule was only selected after examination of those used by Chas. Booth and by German investigators, together with the schedule adopted by the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, and that the one finally selected seemed best fitted for the purpose at the time, although experience would now suggest some changes.

Perhaps the most vital defect of such a table must always be that it will to some degree reflect the personal bias of the compiler. It can only be said that every effort has been made to avoid this element. Pains were taken to study each case apart from all others, and not to allow any consideration of effect upon final results to determine individual decisions. This defect was still further minimized by the fact that the two schedules were prepared wholly independent of each other, and by persons with different economic ideas.¹ This element can be almost entirely eliminated if a large number of persons could be induced to carry on similar studies, and it is hoped that this may be done in the near future.

A. M. SIMONS.

¹Thanks are due to Mr. C. F. Weller, of the Englewood district of the Bureau of Charities, for the preparation of the schedules from that neighborhood.